



Negotiating Pronunciation Proficiency: Identity, Affect, and Indonesian EFL Teachers' Experiences

Bassam Hasan Mahmood Alsalemi¹, Evynurul Laily Zen², Evi Eliyanah³
^{1,2,3}English Education Study Program, Malang State University

Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-05-11 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-10-06 Keywords: affective factors, EFL teachers, intelligibility, pronunciation proficiency, teacher identity DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.10832 Corresponding Author: Bassam Hasan Mahmood Alsalemi bassam.hasan.2402218@students.um.ac.id English Education Study Program, Malang State University	<i>Pronunciation remains one of the persistent challenges in many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, not only for learners but also for teachers who function as both language models and language users. In Indonesia, pronunciation practices are shaped by emotional and sociocultural pressure in the classroom, including anxiety, identity-related concerns, and learners' perception of acceptable pronunciation. Because pronunciation often functions as a marker of competence, legitimacy, and social belonging, teachers may experience tension between maintaining their local linguistic identity and conforming to native-speaker norms. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores how Indonesian EFL teachers experience and negotiate pronunciation proficiency through identity, self-perception, and affective factors in their professional careers. The study draws on Norton's identity and investment theory, Hall's cultural identity theory, and Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. Data were collected through two focus group discussions involving eleven teachers from a private institution in Malang, Indonesia. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes in teachers' experiences and beliefs. The findings reveal that teachers prioritized intelligibility over native-like pronunciation, strategically adjusted their speech to students' proficiency levels, and experienced noticeable shift in their personality when speaking in English. In addition, Affective factors such as anxiety, confidence, validation, and classroom authority significantly influence pronunciation behavior. This study concludes that pronunciation proficiency is a dynamic, identity-sensitive, and emotionally influenced process rather than a purely technical skill.</i>

1. Introduction

Pronunciation has been considered one of the hardest components to teach and learn in the English language, especially when the natural language exposure is limited. In Indonesia, pronunciation difficulties persist between learners despite years of formal instruction (Fitriana & Agustian, 2025; Fadillah, 2020; Zein, 2020). These challenges reflect broader issues in pedagogy, identity, and self-perception as widely discussed in (Sardegna et al., 2018; Saito, 2015; Saito et al., 2018; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Levis, 2018). These challenges are often influenced by broader environmental factors, such as varying levels of school support and a lack of proper infrastructure and learning resources that define many Indonesian educational settings (Mandira et al., 2025; Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Lamb, 2017).

Many Indonesian EFL learners not only struggle with technical aspects of pronunciation, such as segmental and suprasegmental features, rhythm, and stress. But also face affective and psychological barriers that hinder learners' ability to speak confidently (Richards & Renandya, 2002). These psychological barriers are rooted within Javanese cultural values such as *isin* (the Javanese term for shame/shyness) and *tata krama* (the Javanese term for etiquette). These values promote social harmony, which likely causes students to be hesitant to speak for fear of making mistakes or disturbing the classroom flow (Permatasari et al., 2025). Also, these factors increase the probability of learners developing inconsistent pronunciation, which may affect their communication skills due to inconsistent teaching models, shifting standards between American and British, and teachers' own varying levels of pronunciation (Fadillah, 2020; Zein, 2020).

As a result, pronunciation development cannot be understood solely through technical aspects but must also be viewed through the lens of identity and self-perception. In this study, identity is understood as how individuals perceive their relationship to the social world and position themselves within it as language users. Identity is seen as not fixed but dynamic and shaped by social interaction, cultural background, and linguistic experience. In the context of English language use, identity reflects how individuals negotiate their sense of self in relation to local and global norms (Norton, 2013)

Recent studies in Indonesia confirm that the existing pronunciation complexities continue to spread. As Fitriana and Agustian (2025) found, learners frequently face difficulties producing English sounds accurately due to limited exposure, inconsistent models, and anxiety surrounding oral performance. Their study emphasizes that pronunciation learning is deeply related to learners' affective status and classroom environment. In this environment, the traditional "one-for-all" teaching method is often insufficient because teachers are required to adopt differentiated teaching strategies to accommodate the students' different linguistic backgrounds and readiness levels (Rohmadhani et al., 2025; Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018). Also, previous studies on Indonesian English language learners' pronunciation are strongly influenced by first language phonological patterns (Saito, 2015).

Although often discussed in relation to learners, similar pressures are also experienced by teachers. At the same time, teachers often face pressure in order to sound native, which can generate anxiety and identity-related tension, that is, a conflict between expressing a local linguistic identity and conforming to native-like speaker norms. This reflects teachers' desire to project professional competence while keeping their own linguistic identity. (Sung, 2016; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). This tension reflects a broader identity struggle, particularly in how teachers position

themselves between their local linguistic background and expectations of native pronunciation. Aligning with the findings from international research that highlight how pronunciation learning is tied to learners' sense of self and belonging (Norton, 2000; Saito et al., 2018).

Beyond technical and affective factors, pronunciation holds a symbolic value to the learners. Norton's (2000) theory of identity and investment, where investment refers to learners' commitment to language learning based on expected social and professional returns, highlights how language participation and motivation are shaped by how they see themselves as language users and how they negotiate their place as language speakers in the desired communities. Thus, pronunciation plays a crucial role because it serves as a site for identity construction, where individuals negotiate their presence as language users. Pronunciation can cause positive or negative emotions, while some gain confidence for having native-like speech, others may experience anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Sung, 2016; Saito et al., 2018).

Language learners are trying to find their place in the community they want to be a part of, and pronunciation plays a role in that (Norton, 2013). Stuart Hall's (1990) cultural identity theory similarly sees identity as fluid and shaped by social interactions and evolving contexts. For EFL learners and teachers in Indonesia, these identity negotiations involve balancing their local linguistic and cultural identity with the expectations of native-like or global English norms, particularly in professional classroom settings. These negotiations become significant because English is not just a school subject but also a symbol of academic legitimacy and professional competence, often associated with access to economic opportunities (Norton, 2013).

Recent efforts to articulate the impact of psychosocial factors in speaking and, in particular, pronunciation underscore the significance of identity and self-perception as the most prominent determinants of one's oral proficiency. Sardegna, Lee, and Kusey (2018), for example, found that in their study, learners who demonstrate a higher self-efficacy regarding their pronunciation tend to be more active in their pronunciation practice and more positive in their progress over time. Self-efficacy in the Indonesian context is a dynamic and motivational power that is highly influenced by the teachers' professional autonomy and their mastery experiences within the classroom (Hastomo et al., 2025).

In the same way, according to Saito (2015), self-evaluating, self-regulating, and self-monitoring are vital in attaining sustainable success in mastering one's pronunciation. These findings align with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of anxiety, confidence, and emotional state in language acquisition and pronunciation development. This aligns with recent studies on EFL in Indonesia, which emphasize the affective dimension. (Novika, 2025; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2022), for example, a qualitative study on EFL learners, students cite embarrassment, mistake-avoidance, and lack of confidence as barriers to their own oral proficiency development.

In a recent study by Afra et al. (2025), it was stated that Indonesian learners evaluated non-native English accents in ways that reflect social and cultural perceptions of identity. These evaluations were influenced by their perception of the speaker's identity and the legitimacy of his/her language. There was a tendency for the students to perceive a high prestige accent as an indispensable component of a speaker's identity.

This tendency persists even in contexts of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), where communication is generally oriented towards intelligibility over native-like pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2011; Levis, 2018). Moreover, this reinforces the tension between learners' expectations and the rationale behind the teaching of global English, focusing on the intelligibility of speakers, rather than on their nativeness. At the same time, exposure to multiple pronunciation models may help learners develop listening flexibility and communicative adaptability in global English interactions.

However, achieving this intelligibility in the Indonesian context is complicated due to large class sizes and heavy teacher workload. These conditions limit opportunities for individualized instruction, where teachers adjust pacing or tasks for different learners, and make it difficult to implement more personalized approaches that cover learners' specific needs, goals, and identities. As a result, pronunciation teaching tends to rely on more teacher-centered practices, reducing opportunities for meaningful engagement and development (Rahmawati et al., 2025)

In many EFL contexts, native-speaker ideology, which refers to the belief that native speakers represent the ideal and most legitimate model for English use, continues to shape both teaching practices and learner expectations (Sung, 2016; Levis, 2018). This ideology often prefers native-like pronunciation over intelligibility, leading learners and teachers to associate successful language use with native norms. As a result, even when effective communication is emphasized, the pressure to acquire native pronunciation remains strong.

This ideological tension can influence psychological pressure for both teachers and learners, as native-speaker norms, which are difficult to obtain, are idealized. As a result, teachers and learners may fear negative evaluation when their pronunciation differs from native-speaker norms, leading to anxiety and reluctance to use spoken English. Furthermore, when different pronunciation models are introduced without a clear explanation, learners may experience confusion and frustration as they attempt to develop a stable sense of their pronunciation identity (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014)

Despite the growing research in this area, there are clear gaps in the Indonesian EFL context. While many studies discuss learners' difficulties in learning pronunciation, very few investigate how identity-tension and self-perception affect pronunciation proficiency, particularly among Indonesian EFL learners. These two factors are important to examine together because identity tension reflects learners' struggle between following native-speaker norms and keeping their own linguistic identity, while self-perception influences their confidence and willingness to speak.

By focusing on these aspects, this study seeks to contribute to the discussion of pronunciation learning, identity in second language acquisition, and affective factors in language learning. Existing research tends to focus on classroom difficulties, phonological errors, or teaching models, but rarely explores the relationship between pronunciation proficiency and learner-related factors such as identity and self-perception.

In this context, identity is understood not only as a psychological construct related to how learners see themselves, but also as a social and cultural process shaped by their interaction with language norms. Studies such as those conducted by Fitriana and Agustian (2025) and Afra et al. (2025) explore identity-related affective factors, but rarely examine how these factors shape identity construction, self-perception, and imagined English selves. Additionally, most previous studies focus on students rather than teachers, even though teachers also play an important role as language models, and their personal

insecurities and identity tension influence their teaching practices and classroom interactions.

The current study seeks to fill this gap by examining how English language teachers in Indonesia handle identity tensions, pronunciation self-perception, and affective barriers in their professional careers. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on identity tension and self-perception in pronunciation proficiency among non-native teachers, a topic rarely explored in the Indonesian context. The present study moves beyond the traditional discussion around pronunciation techniques and learners' mistakes. Instead, this investigation offers an understanding of pronunciation proficiency as an emotional and social process closely connected to teachers' professional and linguistic identities as non-native English speakers. By integrating Hall's (1990) cultural identity theory, Norton's (2000) identity and investment framework, and Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, this study offers a deeper understanding of pronunciation not simply as a technical aspect but also as an emotional, social, and identity process.

This study is guided by three main theoretical frameworks that together explain the relationship between pronunciation, identity, and self-perception. First, Norton's (2000, 2013) theory of identity and investment is used to understand how teachers position themselves as English users and how their expectations influence their pronunciation practices. Second, Hall's (1990) cultural identity theory provides a lens for viewing identity as fluid and continuously shaped through social interaction, particularly when teachers switch between languages and professional roles. Third, Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis is used to explain how teachers navigate their emotions, such as anxiety, confidence, and self-perception, through pronunciation. Together, these frameworks position pronunciation not only as a technical skill but also as a dynamic process shaped by identity negotiation, social interaction, and emotional experience in classroom contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to (1) explore how identity tension shapes teachers' pronunciation experiences, (2) examine the influence of self-perception and affective factors, and (3) understand how teachers negotiate pronunciation expectation within their work. By highlighting the teachers' experiences, this study contributes to the understanding of pronunciation development.

2. Method

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as the primary data collection method. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to explore teachers' identity tensions and self-perception related to pronunciation, which are complex and cannot be properly captured through numerical data. This aligns with qualitative research perspectives that focus on understanding meanings, experience, and socially constructed realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Since this study views identity and self-perception as socially constructed, a qualitative design is considered the most suitable approach.

FGDs were specifically chosen because they allow the participants to interact, respond to each other, and explore more views together. Focus group discussions are considered effective for exploring shared experiences and collective views, especially when the topic discusses identity as a social process (Morgan, 1997).

Research Instruments

The main instrument used in this study was focus group discussions (FGDs) guided by semi-structured questions designed specifically to guide the participants to interact, respond, and explore new views from each other. The questions were developed based on the study's theoretical frameworks, particularly identity and self-perception in pronunciation. The use of semi-structured questions allows flexibility while still maintaining focus on key themes. This enables researchers to explore participants' lived experiences while allowing new insights to surface during interaction (Kvale, 1996).

The questions focused on psychological and experiential aspects, such as how teachers perceive themselves as English users, identity tension, and what they do to adapt to these aspects. Open-ended questions were used to encourage deeper reflections and discussion among participants.

Research Participants

Two FGDs were conducted with a total of 11 teachers from LB LIA Malang, consisting of 5 males and 6 females. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, which focuses on choosing information-rich individuals who can provide deep insights into a phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002).

As a well-established English language institution in Indonesia, LB LIA emphasizes standardized English proficiency and professional language performance. This institutional environment may increase pronunciation-related pressure among teachers, particularly because they are expected to function as both linguistic models and language instructors for students while also being approachable and close to their students. Such expectations make LB LIA a relevant context for exploring identity tension and pronunciation self-perception among non-native English teachers.

It is important to note that the teachers at LB LIA Malang teach across different program levels, including General English Elementary (GEE), General English Pre-intermediate (GEP), General English Intermediate (GEI), General English Higher Intermediate (GHI), English for Specific Purposes (such as conversations and test preparations), as well as programs for teens and young learners. More experienced and proficient teachers are typically assigned to a wider range of levels, while less experienced teachers are limited to certain levels. This variation in teaching assignments reflects differences in experience and proficiency, which may influence how teachers perceive their pronunciation and professional identity.

The selection was based on the following criteria:

1. They actively teach English in a reputable institution setting.
2. They are considered as language users and models.
3. They're TEFL-certified teachers who have experience in teaching English for at least 6 months.
4. They're proficient enough in the English language, as shown in their average TOEFL score of 588 (ranging from 560 – 642).

This group is ideal for this study for their dual role as English users and language models, which positions them at the intersection of professional expectation and personal linguistic identity. This makes them highly suitable for examining identity tension and pronunciation self-perception.

Data Collection

Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each lasting around 15-25 minutes. The use of two FGDs instead of one larger group was preferred in order to create a more manageable discussion setting, ensuring all participants had sufficient opportunities to share their perspectives. Smaller group sizes are recommended in focus group research to encourage participants and get deeper interactions between participants. (Morgan, 1997) In addition, conducting two separate FGDs allowed the researcher to compare the data across groups and identify recurring themes, which strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Although the FGDs duration ranged from 15-25 minutes, the participants were highly familiar with the topic due to their shared institutional and professional experiences. The focused nature of guiding questions enabled participants to provide direct and experience-based responses within a relatively short period. Although longer discussions are often more recommended in qualitative research, shorter FGDs can still generate meaningful insights when participants share a relatively similar background, and the topic is specific (Morgan, 1997). Recurring patterns across participants also suggested sufficient thematic depth and saturation for the purpose of this current study.

To build trust and encourage openness, the researcher ensured that the discussions were held in a comfortable and non-judgmental environment. The participants were given a consent form that ensured that their data, responses, and interactions would remain confidential. Also, the participants were informed that there are no right or wrong answers so that they can openly share their perspectives without hesitation.

In addition, since the participants shared the same professional background, this familiarity created a sense of mutual understanding and shared experiences, which encouraged them to be more open during the discussion. The researcher also occupied an insider position as a member of the same institutional and professional context as the participants, which facilitated rapport-building and encouraged more open discussion. At the same time, the researcher remained aware that shared experiences and prior assumptions could influence data interpretation. To minimize potential bias, the researcher engaged in continuous reflection during the coding and analysis process while maintaining close attention to participants' original meanings and narratives. The researcher also positioned himself as a moderator rather than an evaluator, allowing participants to express their experiences freely without feeling assessed.

All discussions were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Prior to the sessions, the participants were given a consent form and informed about the purpose of the study, ensuring voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any time prior to data analysis and publication without any consequences. After the data had been anonymized and the findings reported, the participants could no longer withdraw, as individual responses could no longer be identified.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis followed several systematic steps. First, the researcher familiarized himself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcript to have a clear understanding of the participants' responses. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful units related to pronunciation challenges, identity, and emotional experience. Examples of initial codes included (1) fear of negative evaluation, (2) pressure to sound native-like, (3) classroom confidence, (4) professional legitimacy.

These codes were later grouped into broader themes related to identity negotiation affective experiences, and pronunciation expectations. Next, the codes were organized into categories to develop potential themes. The themes were reviewed and then refined to ensure coherence and relevance to suit the research objectives. Finally, the themes were clearly identified and interpreted to capture the underlying patterns in participants' experiences. The analysis was conducted repeatedly, allowing the researcher to revisit the data to ensure that even subtle insights were not overlooked.

3. Results

This section presents the findings of the thematic analysis based on the two focus group discussions (FGDs). The findings showcase that the participants see pronunciation not as a technical skill but as a flexible tool used for communication and a key marker of their professional identity. The analysis reveals four interrelated themes reflecting how teachers negotiate intelligibility, identity, and emotional stress in their professional careers.

Theme 1: Intelligibility as the Core of Pronunciation Proficiency

Interestingly, despite the different years of experience, all the participants shared the same view about intelligibility being more important than having a native-like accent. The teachers constantly defended the idea that having an understandable pronunciation is the best way of communication.

Excerpt 1

"there's no point in having good pronunciation actually if the students cannot understand"(A1, female, 9 months of experience, teaches GEE, GEP, and GEI levels)

This statement highlights that even having a native-like accent can sometimes hinder communication between the teacher and the students because it is unfamiliar to the students to listen to native-like accent. In this case, pronunciation is evaluated not by accuracy but by its communicative effectiveness.

Excerpt 2

"When I teach low levels for adults, so GEE-2, the first two meetings, I think it's because I also speak kind of fast, so they couldn't understand what I said. So after that, I pronounce my words more clearly so that they know.... What I'm talking about" (B1, female, 9 months of experience, teaches GEE and GEP levels).

This shows that pronunciation is not fixed but actively modified to ensure students' understanding. The teacher actively modifies her speech to match students' needs which indicates that intelligibility is a dynamic process rather than a fixed standard. One participant defined having a good pronunciation as:

Excerpt 3

“the audience getting the message” (C1, male, 9 months of experience, teaches GEE and GEP levels).

This definition emphasizes that pronunciation is judged by whether meaning is successfully conveyed or not. This reflects a communicative perspective, where pronunciation is shaped by active interaction and listener understanding rather than following native norms.

Teachers also shared skepticism surrounding the prioritization of native-speaker models, especially in Indonesian EFL contexts. They argued that focusing on accent accuracy is impractical and can distract the students from learning. One participant mentioned that some students may even feel “horrificed” and unable to relate to the teachers’ speech due to the lack of their linguistic background. The participants preferred using a “standard” or “proper” pronunciation.

Excerpt 4

“clear enough to be understood”(D1, male, 8 years of experience, teaches all advanced levels).

This reflects a broader change in pronunciation pedagogy away from native-speaker standards toward effective intelligibility, particularly in EFL settings where accessibility and comprehension are prioritized.

Theme 2: Context-Dependent Pronunciation Identity Negotiation

The findings reveal that the teachers do not have a fixed pronunciation, but instead continuously adjust their pronunciation depending on the teaching context, particularly the students’ proficiency level. This indicates that pronunciation is not only a linguistic skill, but also a strategic and identity-related practice. This supports Norton’s (2000, 2013) view of identity as fluid and negotiated through social interaction rather than fixed, where language use, including pronunciation shifts based on context and expectations (Yazan & Lindahl, 2020; Pennington & Richards, 2016).

When teaching higher levels like advanced general English, TOEFL preparation, or IELTS preparation classes, participants reported feeling pressured to sound sophisticated. Interestingly, pronunciation-related pressure appeared across novice and experienced teachers, although it was expressed differently. Less experienced teachers tended to focus more on being perceived as competent and professional, while more experienced teachers emphasized classroom control, intelligibility, and strategic adaptation to students’ needs. This suggests that pronunciation anxiety does not necessarily disappear with experience but instead shifts in form depending on teachers’ professional roles and classroom expectations.

Excerpt 5

One participant mentioned, “We should make our pronunciation.....as sophisticated as possible because they are high-level students, so they will respect the teacher more” (C1, male, 9 months of experience, teaches GEE and GEP levels).

This statement suggests that pronunciation can function as a marker of professional competence. This pressure reflects teachers’ desires to maintain credibility and authority in front of advanced students. This pressure may become stronger in institutional settings associated with standardized testing and high proficiency expectations, where

pronunciation is often linked to professional legitimacy and teaching credibility. In some cases, this leads the teachers to create deliberate strategies to control the classroom. For example, one participant described a personal strategy, stating that:

Excerpt 6

“at the first meeting, I already assert dominance.... I’m better than you. They listen to me” (D1, male, 8 years of experience, teaches all advanced levels).

This reflects how pronunciation is used not only as a tool for communication but also as a tool for constructing professional identity and legitimacy. This aligns with Norton’s concept of investment, where language practices are linked to gaining authority, credibility and professional recognition within power-driven classroom interactions.

In contrast, when teaching in lower-level classes, teachers described a different type of pressure, which is the fear of being misunderstood by the students. One participant mentioned that this as:

Excerpt 7

“different kind of pressure” (C2, female, 7 years of experience, teaches all levels).

This statement captures a shift in the teaching challenges. Unlike advanced classes, where the pressure is to appear competent, the pressure in lower-level classes is ensuring that communication is effective and meaning is successfully delivered. This indicates that teachers must re-evaluate their role, moving from being the expert to ensuring accessibility. In this context, teachers need to prioritize intelligibility over their own personal pronunciation. Additionally, the teachers intentionally simplify their pronunciation or speak in slower tones just to ensure students’ comprehension.

Excerpt 8

“I had to simplify my pronunciation.... Like really simplify it” (D1, male, 8 years of experience, teaches all advanced levels).

This demonstrates that pronunciation is strategically adjusted to support communication. The focus on simplification highlights that effective teaching requires flexibility, where clarity becomes more important than maintaining an accent or identity. Importantly, this challenges the assumption that effective English teaching must always reflect native-speaker pronunciation norms. Instead, the findings suggest that accessibility and student comprehension are prioritized over accent performance in actual classroom practice.

At the same time, another participant noted that:

Excerpt 9

“we have to look at the students’ profile first” (C2, male, 2 years of experience, teaches all levels before advanced).

These two statements highlight the importance of adapting to learners’ needs. This demonstrates a shift from an authoritative expert identity to a more accessible facilitator role, showing how teachers negotiate their identity based on students’ proficiency levels and classroom demands (Jenkins, 2000; Pennington & Richards, 2016).

Moreover, some participants reported intentionally adapting a more localized or Indonesian-influenced pronunciation style when teaching beginners. One participant stated:

Excerpt 10

"I try to teach as simply as possible, using Indonesian style, of course" (D2, male, 5 years of experience, teaches all levels).

While another participant mentioned adapting Javanese pronunciation while teaching

Excerpt 11

"sometimes I say words in Javanese just to show the students the difference" (C1, male, 9 months of experience, teaches GEE and GEP levels).

These two statements suggest that teachers strategically move away from native-like models in order to ensure clarity and relatability. These practices further demonstrate identity flexibility rather than inconsistency.

Theme 3: Language as an Identity and the Concept of English Self

The findings reveal that pronunciation is closely tied to teachers' sense of identity. Participants described noticeable changes in their personalities, behaviors, and self-perception depending on the language they use, suggesting that language functions as a marker of different social identities. One participant reported that:

Excerpt 12

"when we use English, I'm more serious, more professional....it's just another version of me" (A1, female, 9 months of experience, teaches GEE, GEP, and GEI levels).

This highlights that English is related to formality and professionalism, especially in institutional settings. Similarly, other participants agreed with the previous statement that when speaking English, it often requires them to be more formal and have a controlled persona compared to when they use their own local languages.

Interestingly, a pattern emerged when comparing responses across gender. Approximately 80% of female participants reported experiencing a shift in their personality when speaking English, often describing themselves as becoming more formal, serious, or professional. In contrast, around 80% of male participants indicated that they did not feel any significant changes in their personality when switching languages. This difference suggests that the experience of identity transformation through language use may not be uniform, but instead influenced by individual and possibly sociocultural factors. This variation suggests that identity construction through language is not universal but shaped by individual experiences and sociocultural positioning, reinforcing the idea that identity is multiple and context-dependent.

This pattern suggests that female teachers experience stronger pressure to appear professional and show linguistic competence through English, particularly in institutional contexts where pronunciation is associated with credibility and authority. The findings may also reflect broader sociocultural expectations regarding how women present themselves professionally in educational settings. Although this does not aim to generalize gender differences, the pattern indicates that identity negotiation through pronunciation may be experienced differently across genders and deserve further investigation in future research.

In contrast, local languages such as Javanese or Indonesian were associated with intimacy, informality, and personal relationships. Participants described feeling more relaxed and authentic using their native language, highlighting a clear difference between professional self and personal self. One participant stated that:

Excerpt 13

“when I use Javanese, it’s usually when I’m close with someone....even if I’m really close with someone and I’m talking about something serious, I’m using English” (E1, female, 9 months of experience, teaches GEE and GEP levels).

This highlights that switching languages is influenced by the tone or the topic of the conversation. This suggests that pronunciation, as part of language use, becomes a key signal of shifting identity across contexts. This reflects Hall’s notion that identity is relational and constructed through cultural and social contexts, where different languages can indicate different social meanings and interpersonal relationships (Hall, 1990; Sung, 2016).

Moreover, some participant faced social resistance when using their English-speaking identity outside the classroom. One participant shared that others would say:

Excerpt 14

“stop pronouncing it that way, we know you are an English teacher” (D2, male, 5 years of experience, teaches all levels).

This indicates that their pronunciation style marked a different social persona. This reflects tension between professional identity and social belonging, when speaking in a different way is perceived differently or as inauthentic in local contexts. This highlights that pronunciation holds social meaning beyond intelligibility and can position speakers differently within their communities, sometimes creating tension between professional identity and social belonging (Levis, 2018; Sung, 2016).

In addition, participants highlighted that their accent and pronunciation may change depending on the language they are using. One participant stated that:

Excerpt 15

“when I speak English, my accent is like this.....When I say something in Javanese, it changes” (E2, female, 8 years of experience, teaches all levels).

This suggests that identity is dynamically negotiated through language use rather than remaining fixed across contexts.

Theme 4: Managing Confidence and Anxiety Through Validation and Classroom Control

The findings reveal that pronunciation is not only a tool for communication or identity, but it is also closely related to teachers’ emotional experiences, particularly anxiety and the need for validation. Participants described feeling insecure about being judged, especially by advanced students, and responded by seeking validation, asserting dominance, and carefully leaving a strong first impression in the classroom. One participant shared his experience on teaching IELTS preparation class:

Excerpt 16

“In my first few IELTS classes, the students were judging me based on my pronunciation..., so at the first meeting, I already assert dominance... I’m better than you, I’m the teacher” (D1, 8 years of experience, teaches all advanced levels).

While this may sound like a strategy of control, it can also be interpreted as a way to reduce anxiety and not be judged as the teacher, reinforcing their position as a knowledgeable and credible teacher. By asserting authority, the teacher minimized the likelihood of being challenged or questioned by the students. These findings support Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, where anxiety and self-confidence influence language performance, and suggest that teachers manage these emotional pressures through classroom strategies.

At the same time, teachers reported feeling proud when approached and asked about their pronunciation, or when people assumed that the teachers had studied abroad. These moments were described as being "special" and more confident about their English ability. One participant stated that:

Excerpt 17

"one student approached me and asked if I studied overseas or not, because my pronunciation was good in her opinion" (F1, female, 5 years of experience, teaches all advanced levels).

This validation does not make their pronunciation better, but it has a major difference in the classroom as teachers feel less anxious and more comfortable using English in the classroom. This reflects how positive external validation can lower the affective filter and increase confidence, even without improvement in technical pronunciation skills.

In addition, communication breakdowns in the classroom also contributed to the feelings of uncertainty. When teaching lower level classes (GEE) or (GEP) students may not understand the pronunciation used by the teacher which one participant described as:

Excerpt 18

"different kind of pressure" (E1, female, 9 months of experience, teaches GEE and GEP levels),

and Excerpt 19

"I have to repeat myself a lot of times...sometimes I don't understand what they're saying" (E2, female, 8 years of experience, teaches all levels).

This illustrates how miscommunication can cause frustration and self-doubt, reinforcing intelligibility as both a teaching goal and a source of reassurance. This highlights that anxiety is not only linked to evaluation but also to communication breakdowns, positioning intelligibility as both a pedagogical goal and an emotional support mechanism.

Taken together, these findings suggest that pronunciation proficiency among Indonesian EFL teachers is not only a technical competence but also a combination of communicative priorities, identity negotiation, and affective regulation. Across the themes, teachers continuously adjust their pronunciation based on students' needs, institutional expectations, and social positioning while simultaneously managing emotional pressures such as anxiety and the need for validation. By bringing together Norton's concept of identity as investment, Hall's view of identity as socially constructed, and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, this study highlights that pronunciation is a dynamic, context-dependent practice shaped by linguistic, social, and emotional dimensions (Levis, 2018; Saito et al., 2018; Sardegna et al., 2018).

To provide a concise overview of the themes identified across the FGDs, Table 1 summarizes the main focus and the characteristics of each theme.

Table 1. Summary of Themes from Focus Group Discussions

Theme	Core Focus	Typical Teacher Behaviour	Emotional Aspect
1. Intelligibility as Primary Goal	Meaning over accent	Clear, slowed speech	Reduce pressure
2. Context Dependant Identity	Adjusting by class level	Sophisticated vs simplified speech	Anxiety management
3. English Self	Language as an identity	Professional tone in English	Identity awareness
4. Managing confidence	Validation & authority	Strong first impression	Pride, reassurance

4. Discussion

This study aims to explore how Indonesian EFL teachers experience pronunciation proficiency through the lenses of identity, self-perception, and affective factors. The findings indicate that pronunciation is not only about technical skills but also a social, emotional, and identity-driven practice (Levis, 2018; Sardegna et al., 2020; Saito et al., 2017). By highlighting Norton's identity theory, Hall's concept of cultural identity, and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, this discussion aims to understand the nuances of pronunciation proficiency in a deeper manner by focusing on how pronunciation behaviors are shaped by dynamic identity positioning, language and culture in identity construction, and emotional regulation.

Pronunciation as a Dynamic Identity Positioning (Norton)

Norton's identity theory conceptualizes identity as fluid, negotiable, and shaped by power relations through interactions in social contexts rather than a fixed personality trait (Norton, 2000; Norton, 2013). The findings of this study strongly support this perspective, teachers did not present a rigid pronunciation identity; instead, they demonstrated a flexible pronunciation identity shaped by classroom context, students' needs, proficiency levels, and perceived expectations to suit the situation they are in, adjusting the way they speak in each class while considering the context, level, students' proficiency, and perceived expectations (Yazan & Lindahl, 2020; Pennington & Richards, 2016).

The second theme showcases this dynamic clearly. When teaching higher-level classes, teachers tend to sound as sophisticated as possible as a strategic move to assert professional legitimacy. This strongly aligns with Norton's identity theory, particularly the concept of investment, where language is tied with anticipated results such as respect, authority, and credibility (Norton, 2013). Teachers' careful pronunciation in advanced classes was not just about accuracy, but also as a method to position themselves as competent professionals within a power-driven interaction with the students (Levis, 2018; Sung, 2016).

These pressures may also reflect broader institutional and neoliberal expectations within English language education, where teachers are expected to continuously demonstrate professionalism, fluency, and standardized proficiency. In institutional settings associated with high achievement and standardized testing, pronunciation may also be tied to employability, legitimacy, and professional value, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies that position native-like pronunciation as a symbol of competence and authority.

In contrast, when teaching lower-level students, teachers intentionally simplify their language, slow their speech, and adapt local ways of pronouncing words to ensure understanding (Jenkins, 2000). This change signals a shift from authoritative expert to an accessible facilitator. These adjustments do not mean inconsistency; they reveal teachers' fluidity in incorporating different identities. Thus, pronunciation becomes a tool in which teachers negotiate their roles, authority, and relationships with learners, reinforcing Norton's argument that identity is established through social interactions (Norton, 2000).

These findings also align with English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Global Englishes perspectives, which prioritize intelligibility, adaptability, and successful communication over conformity to native-speaker norms (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2011). The teachers' intentional adjustment of pronunciation, speech rate, and localized pronunciation strategies illustrate how pronunciation in multilingual EFL contexts functions as communicative and flexible practice rather than fixed native-speaker target. In this sense, pronunciation flexibility may reflect pedagogical competence rather than linguistic deficiency.

Language and Culture in Identity Construction (Hall)

Hall's cultural identity theory emphasizes that identity is not something fixed or singular, but it is built through discourse and social interactions (Hall, 1990). The findings relate to the "English Self," which strongly supports Hall's view. Teachers constantly feel like a different person when they speak English compared to Javanese or Indonesian, indicating that the language choice triggers shifts in personality, behavior, and self-presentation (Norton, 2013). The findings may also reflect translanguaging practices, where teachers move fluidly between English, Indonesian, and Javanese not only for communication but also for identity negotiation and relational positioning within the classroom. Rather than separating languages into rigid systems, participants strategically used multiple linguistic resources to maintain accessibility, authority, and emotional connection with students.

English was associated with professionalism and seriousness, while local languages were linked to intimacy and informality. This division reflects Hall's view that identity being relational and context-dependent rather than internally stable. Teachers' pronunciation worked as identity markers that show which "Self" was controlling in a given interaction (Sung, 2016). Thus, people can identify the differences in characters when speaking in English. This can cause social resistance to the English-speaking identity outside of the classroom. Teachers were told to "stop pronouncing it that way" by friends or family members.

This highlights how pronunciation carries social meaning beyond intelligibility (Levis, 2018; Sung, 2016). When speaking English with a different accent, teachers were perceived differently within their social communities, sometimes creating tension between professional identity and social belonging. This supports Hall's view that identity is continuously negotiated through cultural contexts. Similar identity tensions have also been reported in other Asian EFL contexts such as Japan, South Korea, and China, where teachers often negotiate between local linguistic identity and native-speaker expectations in professional settings (Sung, 2016). This demonstrates that pronunciation-related

identity negotiation may reflect broader sociolinguistic pressures across Asian environments rather than functioning as an exclusively Indonesian phenomenon.

Therefore, pronunciation functions not only as a linguistic practice but as a symbolic act in which teachers navigate between professional, social, and local identities. Their ability to shift between linguistic personas reflects their identity flexibility rather than identity confusion.

Affective Regulation and Pronunciation Anxiety (Krashen)

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests emotional factors such as anxiety, confidence, and self-esteem can heavily influence language performance (Krashen, 1982). The findings support this claim by relating it to validation, pride, and classroom control as a concrete means of reducing affective barriers in pronunciation (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Novika, 2025).

Teachers' reports of pride resulting from external validation, such as being complimented on their accent, showcase how positive feedback can reduce their anxiety and make them feel less pressured and increase their willingness to speak comfortably (Saradegna et al., 2020). These moments didn't specifically improve their technical skills in pronunciation, but they reduced self-doubt and increased confidence, giving them room to exercise their pronunciation fluently. This aligns with Krashen's claim that emotional readiness can be very influential on language performance.

Additionally, teachers' strategic behavior in asserting dominance in early classroom meetings can be understood as an affective regulation strategy (Hastomo et al., 2025). By establishing credibility early, teachers reduce the fear of being evaluated throughout the course rather than eliminating anxiety entirely. These strategies help the teachers to keep their affective filter manageable in order not to influence their performance while doing their job. These findings extend Krashen's framework by showing that affective factors are not passive conditions but are actually negotiated through classroom practices.

Most importantly, anxiety also affects experienced teachers, suggesting that affective challenges are not just faced by learners (Saito, 2016). This underlines that pronunciation anxiety is a professional issue affecting teachers as well, especially in contexts where native-like pronunciation is considered the norm, which will continue to influence expectations (Levis, 2018; Sung, 2016). Over time, continuous pressure to maintain pronunciation legitimacy may contribute to long-term emotional consequences such as professional insecurity, emotional exhaustion, or burnout, particularly in environments where teachers feel constantly evaluated based on their English performance (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). This suggests that pronunciation anxiety should not be viewed solely as an individual linguistic issue, but also as a structural and emotional challenge within English language teaching professions.

Integrating Identity, Affect, and Pronunciation

Taken together, these findings suggest that pronunciation proficiency among Indonesian EFL teachers emerges from the intersection of identity positioning, cultural self-construction, and affective regulation. Teachers' pronunciation is shaped not only by pedagogical goals but also by how they wish to be perceived, how they manage emotional pressure, and how they navigate their institutional standards while being themselves at the same time. By integrating Norton's, Hall's, and Krashen's frameworks, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a holistic understanding of pronunciation,

looking at it from a linguistic, social, and emotional dimensions (Levis, 2018; Saito et al., 2017; Saradegna et al., 2020).

Implications for EFL Teaching

The analysis demonstrates that pronunciation development should not only focus on technical accuracy but also address identity and emotional factors (Levis, 2018; Saradegna et al., 2020). Teacher education programs may benefit from creating reflective spaces where teachers can openly discuss pronunciation anxiety, identity tension, and classroom pressure without the fear of being judged. Pronunciation training should move beyond technical correction and include discussions about intelligibility, identity negotiation, and emotional regulation in multilingual classrooms (Jenkins, 2000; Levis, 2018).

Institutions may also consider providing mentoring systems, reflective identity workshops, or emotional support mechanisms to help teachers manage professional insecurity related to pronunciation expectations (Dewaele & MacItyre, 2016). By emphasizing intelligibility and communicative effectiveness over native-speaker imitation, teachers may develop greater confidence and flexibility across different teaching contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study examines how Indonesian EFL teachers experience and negotiate pronunciation proficiency through identity, self-perception, and affective factors. The findings suggest that teachers do not see pronunciation as a fixed technical skill, but instead it is seen as a flexible communication resource shaped by classroom context, professional expectations, and emotional experience. Teachers prioritized intelligibility over native-like speech, yet they continued to adjust their pronunciation to maintain professional legitimacy, credibility, and manage classroom dynamics. This is done as a response to the varying students' proficiency levels.

The study further demonstrates that pronunciation is closely tied to identity construction. Teachers noticed a shift in their personalities when speaking English, compared to using local languages. This reinforces the claim that languages can have different identities based on the person and the context in which the language is mainly used. In addition, affective factors such as anxiety, confidence, pride, and validation play a significant role in lowering the pressure teachers have while also increasing their performance while teaching and giving them the freedom to shape pronunciation behavior. Teachers actively implemented strategies to cope with the pressure, such as simplifying speech, asserting authority, and seeking validation to manage emotional pressure and maintain their professional confidence.

By highlighting teachers' lived experiences, this study contributes to pronunciation research by shifting the focus from pronunciation as a technical skill, and also goes beyond the settings of learners and focuses on Indonesian EFL teachers, as they are the language models. The findings of this study suggest that pronunciation development should be approached not only as a technical skill but also as an identity-sensitive and context-dependent process.

Despite these contributions, this study has its own limitations. The findings of this study are focused on a small, purposively selected group of teachers from a single language institution, which may limit the generalization of the findings to other contexts. Also, this study relied on self-reported data from FGDs, which captures perceptions and experiences rather than focusing on observable classroom behavior. Future studies may include larger groups from different institutions and focus on classroom observation. These studies can offer broader findings that can be generalized over many contexts.

6. Acknowledgement

First of all, the author expresses his appreciation to the branch manager, the English teacher, and the administration of LB LIA Malang for their support and facilitating the author to conduct this study. Also, the author would like to express his deepest gratitude to both of his supervisors, Evynurul Laily Zen, S.S., M.A., Ph.D., and Prof. Evi Eliyanah, S.S., M.A., Ph.D., for their continuous support, invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement throughout the completion of this study. Their expertise, patience, and dedication have greatly contributed to the development and completion of this research. Furthermore, the author extends his wholehearted thanks to his family and friends for their unwavering support.

7. References

- Afra, F. T., Noni, N., & Muhayyang, M. (2025). EFL learners' perception of non-native speakers' accent and identity. *Journal of Excellence in English Language Education*.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications.
- Dewaele, J., & MacIntyre, P. (2022). Do Flow, Enjoyment and Anxiety emerge equally in English Foreign Language Classrooms as in other Foreign Language Classrooms? *Revista Brasileira De Lingüística Aplicada*, 22(1), 156–180. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-6398202218487>
- Fadillah, A. C. (2020). Pronunciation difficulties of EFL learners in Indonesia: A literature study. *Jurnal Budaya*, 1(2), 7-13. Retrieved from <https://jurnalbudaya.ub.ac.id/index.php/jbb/article/view/13>
- Fitriana, D., & Agustian, A. F. (2025). Voices of Proficiency: Insights into EFL Pronunciation Teaching Challenges in Indonesian Middle School Teachers. *JEPAL (Journal of English Pedagogy and Applied Linguistics)*, 5(2), 211–222. <https://doi.org/10.32627/jepal.v5i2.1234>
- Hall, S. (1990). *Cultural identity and diaspora: Identity: community, culture, difference*.
- Hastomo, T., Widiati, U., Ivone, F. M., & Zen, E. L. (2025). EFL TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY IN USING AI TOOLS: a COMPARATIVE STUDY IN INDONESIA. *Advanced Education*, 19(27), 103–123. <https://doi.org/10.20535/2410-8286.335502>
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The Phonology of English as an international Language*. Oxford University Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Lamb, M. (2017). The motivational dimension of language teaching. *Language Teaching*, 50(3), 301–346. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444817000088>

- Lestariyana, R. P. D., & Widodo, H. P. (2018). Engaging young learners of English with digital stories: Learning to mean. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v8i2.13314>
- Levis, J. M. (2018). *Intelligibility, oral communication, and the teaching of pronunciation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mandira, U. N. M. a. U. K. W., Siwa, Y. N., Basthomi, Y., Mukminatien, N., & Yannuar, N. (2025). Factors Affecting EFL Teachers' Participation in Professional Development in Disadvantaged Regions : Insights from Indonesia. *The Journal of AsiaTEFL*, 22(4), 722–733. <https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2025.22.4.7.722>
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. SAGE.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*. Pearson PTR Interactive.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the Conversation*. Multilingual Matters.
- Novika, H. (2025). EFL students' perceptions of English pronunciation difficulties. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Sastra Inggris*, 5(3), 193–208. <https://doi.org/10.55606/jupensi.v5i3.6101>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Pennington, M. C., & Richards, J. C. (2016). Teacher identity in language teaching: Integrating personal, contextual, and professional factors. *RELC Journal*, 47(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688216631219>
- Permatasari, A. I., Yannuar, N., & Eliyanah, E. (2025). Navigating Language Anxiety: Social and cultural influences on Javanese female students in learning English. *Ethical Lingua Journal of Language Teaching and Literature*, 12(2), 531–543. <https://doi.org/10.30605/25409190.863>
- Rahmawati, N. M., Basthomi, Y., Widiati, U., Yannuar, N., Suharyadi, S., & Ahamat, M. I. (2025). Personalised English for specific purposes in Indonesian Higher Education: A look through the teachers' lens. *Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education*, 40(2), 237–258. <https://doi.org/10.21315/apjee2025.40.2.11>
- Rohmadhani, A., Suryati, N., & Wulyani, A. N. (2025). Teachers' experience of professional development in differentiated teaching in an English language center. *Language Circle Journal of Language and Literature*, 19(2s), 17–30. <https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v19i2s.29021>
- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Saito, K. (2015). THE ROLE OF AGE OF ACQUISITION IN LATE SECOND LANGUAGE ORAL PROFICIENCY ATTAINMENT. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 37(4), 713–743.
- Saito, K., Dewaele, J. M., Abe, M., & In'nami, Y. (2018). Motivation, emotion, learning experience, and second language comprehensibility development in classroom settings: A cross-sectional and longitudinal study. *Language learning*, 68(3), 709–743.
- Sardegna, Veronica & Lee, Juhee & Kusey, Crystal. (2018). Self-Efficacy, Attitudes, and Choice of Strategies for English Pronunciation Learning. *Language Learning*.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a lingua franca: A complete introduction to the theoretical nature and practical implications of English used as a lingua franca*. OUP Oxford.

- Sung, C. C. M. (2016). Does accent matter? Investigating the relationship between accent and identity in English as a lingua franca communication. *System*, 60, 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.06.002>
- Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. M. (2014). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Yazan, B., & Lindahl, K. (Eds.). (2020). *Language teacher identity in TESOL: Teacher education and practice as identity work*. Routledge.
- Zein, S., Sukyadi, D., Hamied, F. A., & Lengkanawati, N. S. (2020). English language education in Indonesia: A review of research (2011–2019). *Language Teaching*, 53(4), 491–523. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444820000208>